

Current debates and dilemmas in community development

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Editorial

There is currently considerable interest and investment in developing social programs and policies that focus on working with communities in Australia. At a broad level, our work with communities is shaped by ongoing and entrenched inequality; the impact of the globalisation; the threat of climate change and natural disasters; the ongoing effect on practice of new managerialism; and three decades of neo-liberal state interventions. At the same time, culturally we have a heightened awareness of individual difference, choice and identities (Leadbeater 2004). The idea that a good life means individuals must have decision-making power, support and services should be flexible and designed in a way tailored to individual strengths, needs and experiences, is surely a step in the right direction (Beresford et al 2011). As well as the many things we have gained through our increased attention to individual decision-making power, it is important to ensure we don't neglect the importance and collective ideas, collective action and creating spaces for people to come together on common issues. Questions about how to balance individual needs and priorities with collective ideas like the common good, common ground or solidarity are important. In our work we need to ask how our own every day practices, ideas, relationships and even behaviours enact bigger notions such as individuality, collectivism, power, equity, choice and collaboration.

These ideas (among others) thread through this collection, with our contributors demonstrating a strong critically reflexive engagement. This special edition aims to contribute to the pool of knowledge about contemporary community development practice. It reflects the aim of this journal to create a space for considered debate on policy and practice issues with a focus on the intersections of power. The edition is global, with reflections on practice in Zambia, the Dominican Republic, Taiwan and the Philippines as well as Australia. Our contributors engage with issues of race, gender, (dis)ability and class in community development practice. We have included the perspectives of very experienced and novice writers deliberately. These writers reflect on individual practice, social policy and institutional arrangements. They write from the perspective of social work educators, policy analysts, government bureaucrats, researchers and community development practitioners. This diversity reflects the field of community development theory and practice.

In keeping with community development values, our approach to the edition has been collaborative and supportive of those wishing to share their ideas and reflections with others in the field. We hope this experience gives confidence to these writers and others. Creating a culture of respectful mutual exchange and learning is vital for not only community development practice but also for the communities that we work with.

References

Beresford, P., Flemming, J., Glynn, M., Bewley, C., Croft, S., Branfield, F. & Postle, K. (2011), *Supporting people: Towards a person-centred approach*. Policy press, Bristol.

Leadbeater, C. (2004) *Personalisation through participation: A new script for public services*. Demos, London.